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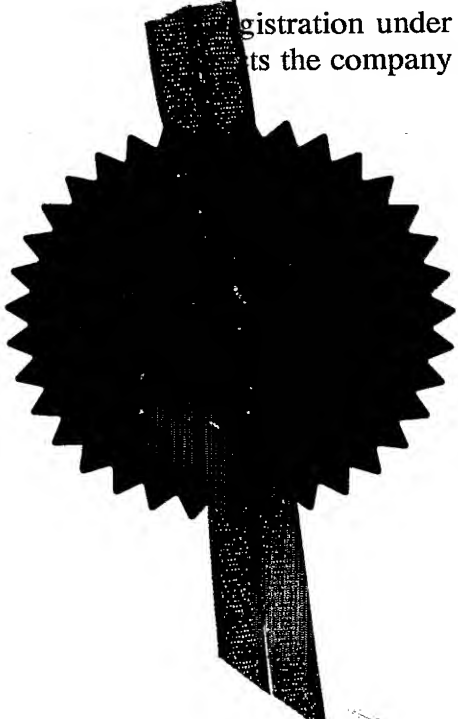
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1. Your reference

10013

2. Patent application number

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22 JAN 2004

3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

BP CHEMICALS LIMITED
BRITANNIC HOUSE
1 FINSBURY CIRCUS
LONDON

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

EC2M 7BA

414 1897002

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

UNITED KINGDOM

4. Title of the invention

POLYMERISATION PROCESS

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

HAWKINS, David George

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode)

BP INTERNATIONAL LIMITED
PATENTS & AGREEMENTS
CHERTSEY ROAD
SUNBURY-ON-THAMES
MIDDLESEX
TW16 7LN
UNITED KINGDOM

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Description	11
Claim(s)	-
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11. I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application.

Signature(s)

David Hawkins
HAWKINS, David George

Date 21.01.2004

12. Name, daytime telephone number and e-mail address, if any, of person to contact in the United Kingdom 01932 763366

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POLYMERISATION PROCESS

The present invention relates to a polymerisation process and in particular to a polymerisation process for the copolymerisation of ethylene and higher α -olefins performed in the gas phase.

5 The gas phase process for the polymerisation of olefins has been widely used in particular for the copolymerisation of ethylene and α -olefins. Commercial production of such copolymers using traditional Ziegler-Natta catalysts has however been limited to the copolymerisation of ethylene and α -olefins having carbon chain lengths of C6 (1-hexene) or less used for example for the preparation of linear low density polyethylene (LLDPE).

10 Higher α -olefins have higher boiling points and when used in gas phase polymerisation processes condensation of the higher α -olefins may occur at concentrations typically used for the production of LLDPE when using Ziegler-Natta catalysts. This may result in problems with continuous and smooth operation.

The use of higher α -olefins for the manufacture of LLDPE has thus been limited
15 to solution phase polymerisation processes. It would be advantageous therefore to develop a gas phase process for the production of LLDPE which allowed for the use of higher α -olefins as comonomers thereby enabling LLDPE resins to be prepared with a broad range of density.

US 5100979 describes a process for producing ethylene/1-octene copolymers in
20 the gas phase in a fluidised bed reactor in the presence of a supported vanadium catalyst where the partial pressures are controlled and the temperature in the reactor is maintained between 5 and 20 °C above the dew point of 1-octene.

US 5106926 describes a similar process for preparing ethylene/1-octene copolymers in a gas phase fluidised bed process in the presence of titanium based catalysts. Again the partial pressures and reactor temperatures are controlled in this case the latter at between 1 and 30 °C above the dew point of the 1-octene.

5 US 6521722 describes the gas phase copolymerisation of ethylene and 1-octene in the presence of a Ziegler Natta catalyst system and where the pressure and temperature of the reaction zone are set so as to define an operating point from 0.2 to 5.0 bar below the dew point of the reaction mixture above which condensation occurs.

10 WO 94/03509 describes the gas phase polymerisation of ethylene and higher α -olefins especially 1-octene to produce polymers with densities in the range 0.850 to 0.940. The polymerisation is controlled with respect to the partial pressures of the reactants and takes place in the presence of transition metal catalyst systems in particular those comprising metallocene complexes.

15 Exemplified gas phase processes in WO 94/03509 are those operating in a conventional fluidised bed reactor in the presence of a catalyst system comprising a silica supported bis (cyclopentadienyl) zirconium dichloride activated by methyl aluminoxane (MAO).

20 We have now surprisingly found that higher α -olefins may be successfully employed in a gas phase process provided the amount of higher α -olefin comonomer is maintained below that at which substantial condensation occurs. Such operation is also dependent upon the operation temperature and the boiling point of the higher α -olefin and the process is particularly advantageous when performed in the presence of catalysts able to incorporate high levels of comonomers at low comonomer inventories. Suitable catalysts of this type are metallocenes and other single site catalysts which may
25 lead to the production of LLDPE resins having commercially interesting densities without resulting in reactor operational difficulties.

The present invention is directed to fluidised bed gas phase processes operating in "condensed mode".

30 Condensed mode is defined as the process of purposefully introducing a recycle stream having a liquid and a gas phase into the reactor such that the weight percent of liquid based on the total weight of the recycle stream is greater than about 2.0 weight percent.

Condensed mode operation is fully described in EP 89691, US 4543399, US 4588790, EP 696293, US 5405922, EP 699213 and US 5541270.

Thus according to the present invention there is provided a process for the copolymerisation of ethylene and an α -olefin having 7 to 10 carbon atoms in a fluidised
5 bed gas phase reactor in the presence of a single site polymerisation catalyst
characterised in that said process is operating in condensed mode and wherein the amount of said α -olefin is maintained below that at which substantial condensation in the reactor occurs.

The α -olefin comonomer is maintained below that at which substantial
10 condensation in the reactor occurs by maintaining the temperature and partial pressures in the reaction zone accordingly.

The comonomer content of the copolymer may be controlled by the partial pressure of the various monomers. The partial pressure of the comonomer in the reaction zone may be maintained up to an amount which would, at a temperature of
15 about 10°C less than the temperature of the monomer mixture in the reaction zone, be the saturated vapour pressure of the comonomer to prevent condensation of the comonomer in the reaction zone.

Preferred α -olefins are 1-octene, 1-decene, norbornene and similar.

A particularly preferred α -olefin is 1-octene.

20 The polymerisation process according to the present invention is suitable for the copolymerisation of ethylene and an α -olefin having 7 to 10 carbon atoms in a fluidised bed gas phase reactor operating in condensed mode at a pressure of between 1 and 3 Mpa and at a temperature of between 60°C and 110°C.

Preferred conditions for operating the process of the present invention are
25 temperatures in the range 70 to 90°C, a pressure in the range 2 to 2.5 Mpa.

Suitable partial pressures for the gas phase components based on C₈ or C₁₀ as comonomer as follows:

Ethylene – between 0.5 and 2 Mpa, preferably between 1 and 1.5 Mpa.

1-Octene/ethylene partial pressure ratio is between 0.0001 and 0.02 and
30 preferably between 0.002 and 0.015.

1-Decene/ethylene partial pressure ratio is between 0.00005 and 0.005, preferably between 0.0001 and 0.0015.

Traditional Ziegler Natta polymerisation catalysts are composed of many types of catalytic species each at different metal oxidation states and different coordination environments with ligands. Metal halides activated by organometallic cocatalysts such as titanium chlorides complexed with trialkylaluminium compounds are typical examples of such catalyst systems. Because these systems contain more than one catalytic species they possess polymerisation sites with different activities and varying abilities to incorporate comonomer into the polymer chain.

On the contrary a single site polymerisation catalyst is a system having catalytic positions which have single activity and selectivity. The resultant copolymer chains are uniform not only in chain length but also in average comonomer content and even regularity of comonomer incorporation along the chain.

The preferred single site polymerisation catalyst suitable for use in the process of the present invention is a bulky ligand compound also referred to as a metallocene complex containing at least one of the aforementioned delocalized π -bonded group, in particular cyclopentadienyl ligands. Such metallocene complexes are those based on Group IVA metals for example titanium, zirconium and hafnium.

Metallocene complexes may be represented by the general formula:



where L is a cyclopentadienyl ligand, M is a Group IVA metal, Q is a leaving group and x and n are dependent upon the oxidation state of the metal.

Typically the Group IVA metal is titanium, zirconium or hafnium, x is either 1 or 2 and typical leaving groups include halogen or hydrocarbyl. The cyclopentadienyl ligands may be substituted for example by alkyl or alkenyl groups or may comprise a fused ring system such as indenyl or fluorenyl.

Examples of suitable metallocene complexes are disclosed in EP 129368 and EP 206794. Such complexes may be unbridged eg. bis(cyclopentadienyl) zirconium dichloride, bis(pentamethyl)cyclopentadienyl dichloride, or may be bridged eg. ethylene bis(indenyl) zirconium dichloride or dimethylsilyl(indenyl) zirconium dichloride.

Other suitable bis(cyclopentadienyl) metallocene complexes are those

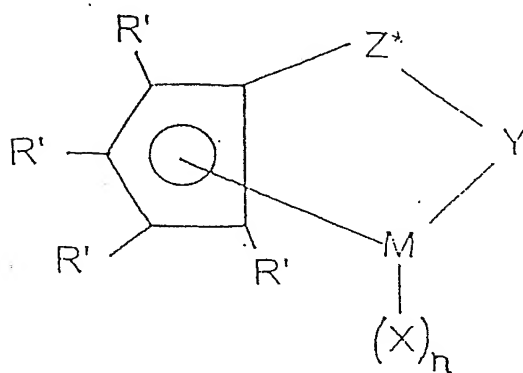
bis(cyclopentadienyl) diene complexes described in WO 96/04290. Examples of such complexes are bis(cyclopentadienyl) zirconium (2,3-dimethyl-1,3-butadiene) and ethylene bis(indenyl) zirconium 1,4-diphenyl butadiene.

Examples of monocyclopentadienyl or substituted monocyclopentadienyl complexes suitable for use in the present invention are described in EP 416815, EP 418044, EP 420436 and EP 551277. Suitable complexes may be represented by the general formula:



wherein Cp is a single cyclopentadienyl or substituted cyclopentadienyl group optionally covalently bonded to M through a substituent, M is a Group VIA metal bound in a η^5 bonding mode to the cyclopentadienyl or substituted cyclopentadienyl group, X each occurrence is hydride or a moiety selected from the group consisting of halo, alkyl, aryl, aryloxy, alkoxy, alkoxyalkyl, amidoalkyl, siloxyalkyl etc. having up to 20 non-hydrogen atoms and neutral Lewis base ligands having up to 20 non-hydrogen atoms or optionally one X together with Cp forms a metallocycle with M and n is dependent upon the valency of the metal.

Particularly preferred monocyclopentadienyl complexes have the formula:



wherein:-

R' each occurrence is independently selected from hydrogen, hydrocarbyl, silyl, germyl, halo, cyano, and combinations thereof, said R' having up to 20 nonhydrogen atoms, and optionally, two R' groups (where R' is not hydrogen, halo or cyano) together form a divalent derivative thereof connected to adjacent positions of the cyclopentadienyl ring to form a fused ring structure;

X is hydride or a moiety selected from the group consisting of halo, alkyl, aryl, aryloxy, alkoxy, alkoxyalkyl, amidoalkyl, siloxyalkyl etc. having up to 20 non-hydrogen atoms and neutral Lewis base ligands having up to 20 non-hydrogen atoms,

Y is -O-, -S-, -NR*-, -PR*-,

M is hafnium, titanium or zirconium,

Z* is SiR*₂, CR*₂, SiR*₂SIR*₂, CR*₂CR*₂, CR*=CR*, CR*₂SIR*₂, or GeR*₂, wherein:

R* each occurrence is independently hydrogen, or a member selected from hydrocarbyl, silyl, halogenated alkyl, halogenated aryl, and combinations thereof, said R* having up to 10 non-hydrogen atoms, and optionally, two R* groups from Z* (when R* is not hydrogen), or an R* group from Z* and an R* group from Y form a ring system.,

and n is 1 or 2 depending on the valence of M.

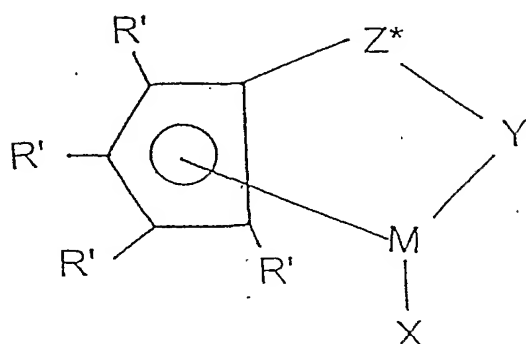
Examples of suitable monocyclopentadienyl complexes are (tert-butylamido) dimethyl (tetramethyl- η^5 -cyclopentadienyl) silanetitanium dichloride and (2-methoxyphenylamido) dimethyl (tetramethyl- η^5 -cyclopentadienyl) silanetitanium dichloride.

Other suitable monocyclopentadienyl complexes are those comprising phosphinimine ligands described in WO 99/40125, WO 00/05237, WO 00/05238 and WO00/32653. A typical examples of such a complex is cyclopentadienyl titanium [tri (tertiary butyl) phosphinimine] dichloride.

Another type of single site catalyst suitable for use in the present invention are monocyclopentadienyl complexes comprising heteroallyl moieties such as zirconium (cyclopentadienyl) tris (diethylcarbamates) as described in US 5527752 and WO 99/61486.

Particularly preferred metallocene complexes for use in the present invention

may be represented by the general formula:



wherein:-

R' each occurrence is independently selected from hydrogen,
 5 hydrocarbyl, silyl, germyl, halo, cyano, and combinations thereof, said R' having up to 20 nonhydrogen atoms, and optionally, two R' groups (where R' is not hydrogen, halo or cyano) together form a divalent derivative thereof connected to adjacent positions of the cyclopentadienyl ring to form a fused ring structure;

X is a neutral η^4 bonded diene group having up to 30 non-hydrogen
 10 atoms, which forms a π -complex with M;

Y is -O-, -S-, -NR^{*}-, -PR^{*}-,

M is titanium or zirconium in the + 2 formal oxidation state;

Z^{*} is SiR^{*}₂, CR^{*}₂, SiR^{*}₂SIR^{*}₂, CR^{*}₂CR^{*}₂, CR^{*}=CR^{*}, CR^{*}₂SIR^{*}₂, or

GeR^{*}₂, wherein:

15 R^{*} each occurrence is independently hydrogen, or a member selected from hydrocarbyl, silyl, halogenated alkyl, halogenated aryl, and combinations thereof, said

R^{*} having up to 10 non-hydrogen atoms, and optionally, two R^{*} groups from Z^{*} (when R^{*} is not hydrogen), or an R^{*} group from Z^{*} and an R^{*} group from Y form a ring system.

20 Examples of suitable X groups include s-trans- η^4 -1,4-diphenyl-1,3-butadiene, s-trans- η^4 -3-methyl-1,3-pentadiene; s-trans- η^4 -2,4-hexadiene; s-trans- η^4 -1,3-pentadiene; s-trans- η^4 -1,4-ditolyl-1,3-butadiene; s-trans- η^4 -1,4-bis(trimethylsilyl)-1,3-butadiene; s-

cis- η^4 -3-methyl-1,3-pentadiene; s-cis- η^4 -1,4-dibenzyl-1,3-butadiene; s-cis- η^4 -1,3-pentadiene; s-cis- η^4 -1,4-bis(trimethylsilyl)-1,3-butadiene, said s-cis diene group forming a π -complex as defined herein with the metal.

Most preferably R' is hydrogen, methyl, ethyl, propyl, butyl, pentyl, hexyl, benzyl, or phenyl or 2 R' groups (except hydrogen) are linked together, the entire C₅R'₄ group thereby being, for example, an indenyl, tetrahydroindenyl, fluorenyl, tetrahydrofluorenyl, or octahydrofluorenyl group.

Highly preferred Y groups are nitrogen or phosphorus containing groups containing a group corresponding to the formula -N(R'')- or -P(R'')- wherein R'' is C₁₋₁₀ hydrocarbyl.

Most preferred complexes are amidosilane - or amidoalkanediyl complexes.

Most preferred complexes are those wherein M is titanium.

Specific complexes suitable for use in the present invention are those disclosed in WO 95/00526 and are incorporated herein by reference.

A particularly preferred complex for is (t-butylamido) (tetramethyl- η^5 -cyclopentadienyl) dimethyl silanetitanium - η^4 -1.3 -pentadiene.

Suitable cocatalysts for use with the transition metal polymerisation of the present invention are those typically used with the aforementioned polymerisation catalysts.

These include aluminoxanes such as methyl aluminoxane (MAO), boranes such as tris(pentafluorophenyl) borane and borates.

Aluminoxanes are well known in the art and preferably comprise oligomeric linear and/or cyclic alkyl aluminoxanes. Aluminoxanes may be prepared in a number of ways and preferably are prepared by contacting water and a trialkylaluminium compound, for example trimethylaluminium, in a suitable organic medium such as benzene or an aliphatic hydrocarbon.

A preferred aluminoxane is methyl aluminoxane (MAO).

Other suitable cocatalysts are organoboron compounds in particular triarylboron compounds. A particularly preferred triarylboron compound is tris(pentafluorophenyl) borane.

Other compounds suitable as cocatalysts are compounds which comprise a cation and an anion. The cation is typically a Bronsted acid capable of donating a

proton and the anion is typically a compatible non-coordinating bulky species capable of stabilizing the cation.

Such cocatalysts may be represented by the formula:



wherein

L^* is a neutral Lewis base

$(L^*-H)^+_d$ is a Bronsted acid

10 A^{d-} is a non-coordinating compatible anion having a charge of d^- , and
 d is an integer from 1 to 3.

The cation of the ionic compound may be selected from the group consisting of acidic cations, carbonium cations, silylium cations, oxonium cations, organometallic
15 cations and cationic oxidizing agents.

Suitably preferred cations include trihydrocarbyl substituted ammonium cations eg. triethylammonium, tripropylammonium, tri(n-butyl)ammonium and similar. Also suitable are N,N-dialkylanilinium cations such as N,N-dimethylanilinium cations.

The preferred ionic compounds used as cocatalysts are those wherein the cation
20 of the ionic compound comprises a hydrocarbyl substituted ammonium salt and the anion comprises an aryl substituted borate..

Typical borates suitable as ionic compounds include:

triethylammonium tetraphenylborate
triethylammonium tetraphenylborate,
25 tripropylammonium tetraphenylborate,
tri(n-butyl)ammonium tetraphenylborate,
tri(t-butyl)ammonium tetraphenylborate,
N,N-dimethylanilinium tetraphenylborate,
N,N-diethylanilinium tetraphenylborate,
30 trimethylammonium tetrakis(pentafluorophenyl) borate,
triethylammonium tetrakis(pentafluorophenyl) borate,
tripropylammonium tetrakis(pentafluorophenyl) borate,

tri(n-butyl)ammonium tetrakis(pentafluorophenyl) borate,
N,N-dimethylanilinium tetrakis(pentafluorophenyl) borate,
N,N-diethylanilinium tetrakis(pentafluorophenyl) borate.

A preferred type of cocatalyst suitable for use with the metallocene complexes
5 of the present invention comprise ionic compounds comprising a cation and an anion
wherein the anion has at least one substituent comprising a moiety having an active
hydrogen.

Suitable cocatalysts of this type are described in WO 98/27119 the relevant
portions of which are incorporated herein by reference.

10 Examples of this type of anion include:

triphenyl(hydroxyphenyl) borate
tri (p-tolyl)(hydroxyphenyl) borate
tris (pentafluorophenyl)(hydroxyphenyl) borate
tris (pentafluorophenyl)(4-hydroxyphenyl) borate

15 Examples of suitable cations for this type of cocatalyst include
triethylammonium, triisopropylammonium, diethylmethylammonium,
dibutylethylammonium and similar.

Particularly suitable are those cations having longer alkyl chains such as
dihexyldecylmethylammonium, dioctadecylmethylammonium,
20 ditetradecylmethylammonium, bis(hydrogenated tallow alkyl) methylammonium
and similar.

Particular preferred cocatalysts of this type are alkylammonium
tris(pentafluorophenyl) 4-(hydroxyphenyl) borates. A particularly preferred cocatalyst
is bis(hydrogenated tallow alkyl) methyl ammonium tris (pentafluorophenyl) (4-
25 hydroxyphenyl) borate.

With respect to this type of cocatalyst, a preferred compound is the reaction
product of an alkylammonium tris(pentafluorophenyl)-4-(hydroxyphenyl) borate and an
organometallic compound, for example triethylaluminium or an aluminosilane such as
tetraisobutylaluminosilane.

30 The single site polymerisation catalysts may suitably be supported.

Suitable support materials include inorganic metal oxides or alternatively
polymeric supports may be used for example polyethylene, polypropylene, clays,

zeolites, etc.

The most preferred support material for use with the supported catalysts according to the method of the present invention is silica. Suitable silicas include Ineos ES70 and Grace Davison 948 silicas.

5 The support material may be subjected to a heat treatment and/or chemical treatment to reduce the water content or the hydroxyl content of the support material. Typically chemical dehydration agents are reactive metal hydrides, aluminium alkyls and halides. Prior to its use the support material may be subjected to treatment at 100°C to 1000°C and preferably at 200 to 850°C in an inert atmosphere under reduced
10 pressure.

The porous supports are preferably pretreated with an organometallic compound preferably an organoaluminium compound and most preferably a trialkylaluminium compound in a dilute solvent.

The support material is pretreated with the organometallic compound at a
15 temperature of -20°C to 150°C and preferably at 20°C to 100°C.

Preferred organoaluminium compounds are trialkyl aluminium compounds containing from 1 to 20 carbons atoms in each alkyl group. Preferred trialkylaluminium compounds are trimethylaluminium, triethylaluminium, triisopropylaluminium and triisobutylaluminium.

20 Suitable catalyst systems for use in the process of the present invention are those described in copending applications 9857, 9873, 9905, 9957, 9962 and 9972 (Applicant's reference numbers).



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